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Chairman: Mr. Zackheos ..... (Cyprus)

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Agenda item 89: Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 89: Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (*continued*) (A/54/73 and Add.1, A/54/181, A/54/182, A/54/183, A/54/184, A/54/185 and A/54/325)

1. **Mr. Osei** (Ghana) said that the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/54/325), like the Special Committee's previous reports, gave information on the plight of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories resulting from the policies of the Israeli Government which were not in accord with internationally accepted standards in the field of human rights. He regretted that the views of the Israeli Government were not reflected in the report, but said that the information was no less credible given the wide variety of sources of information available to the Special Committee.

2. Linked to that issue was the lingering subject of the comprehensive settlement of the Middle East problem. His country reiterated its support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent, sovereign State. Mr. Ehud Barak's victory in the elections in Israel had opened up new prospects for peace throughout the region. While applauding the bold initiative of the Israeli leader, soon after assuming office, to resume dialogue with the Palestinians, his country urged both sides to remain on course in their negotiations on the establishment of durable peace in the region. His delegation considered the concluding observations and recommendations of the Committee, particularly those in paragraphs 258, 260 and 264, to be very positive.

3. The Special Committee's reaffirmation of its recommendation of 1998 that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should take such measures as were appropriate, in consultation with the Secretary-General, to establish a system of continuous communication to improve the circumstances of the people of the occupied territories was significant in view of the need to reduce tension in the area and create a climate that was conducive to constructive dialogue. The international community had a duty in that regard to support the endeavours of the Commissioner for Human Rights to sustain the process of dialogue with the Israeli authorities.

4. **Mr. Wehbe** (Syrian Arab Republic) commended the contents of the report of the Special Committee (A/54/325) which set out reliable, objective and unprejudiced information. The report confirmed that the activities of the Special Committee had lost nothing of its relevance. Moreover, in the present circumstances, its significance was undoubtedly growing. Any attempt to weaken its role must be construed as an endeavour to distance Israel, which was continuing to commit gross violations of human rights, from criticism by the vigilant international community. In spite of General Assembly resolution 2443 (XXIII) of 19 December 1968, Israel continued to refuse to cooperate with the Special Committee; that was hardly surprising in view of the fact that the Special Committee provided the international community with truthful information on the situation in the occupied territories involving terror, the displacement of populations, the creation of settlements and the expropriation of land, water and other natural resources.

5. Israel was enacting laws and taking practical measures that were needed in order to ensure the annexation and Judaization of the occupied territories through settling them with people from various countries of the world. Despite the opinion of the international community, Israel was continuing to carry out the Judaization of the Golan Heights, to demolish towns, to destroy agricultural production and expel Syrians from their homes. All the displaced persons, who now numbered 130,000, were entitled to return to their homes without hindrance. Since the seizure of the Golan by Israel in 1967, 244 inhabited localities had been destroyed and the building of settlements, which now numbered 40, was continuing as before. In spite of resolutions and decisions proclaiming the principle of "land for peace", Israel was holding 96 per cent of the territories of the Golan. One example of the aggressive policy of Israel in the occupied territories was an incident involving five Syrian villages whose inhabitants had been deprived of access to water as a result of the building of settlements. It was to be noted that the Israeli authorities generally refused to issue permits to the local population for the drilling of new wells. Crippling taxes were imposed on the Arab population and the Israeli armed forces were deliberately destroying the environment.

6. Systematic violations of human rights were continuing in the form of torture, the closing of territories, the arbitrary detention of civilians in prisons and penitentiaries, and the illegal arrest and murder of Arabs. Same was also happening in other occupied territories, for example, the Palestinian territories, where Israel continued to conduct its policy against the Palestinian people and its recognized right to create its own State. Israel wanted a peace corresponding to

its own selfish political aspirations. Under cover of the rhetoric of peace-making, Israel was continuing its gross violations of the decisions of the international community by going ahead with the completion of the new settlements in the Golan. The Golan was an inseparable part of the Syrian Arab Republic and must be returned to its people. A declaration by the European Union of 27 August 1998 had called on Israel to put an end to the practice of building settlements in the Golan. Continuation of that policy cast doubt on whether Israel wanted to achieve a genuine peace. As the representatives of the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and France had pointed out, the building of settlements was contrary to international law and damaged the peace process. That practice was clearly no part of the culture of peace to which the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel had spoken in his address to the General Assembly.

7. The illegal actions of Israel were also continuing in South Lebanon where there had also been massive violations of the rights of the Arab population. The international community was entitled to ask whether attacks, murders and the oppression of the local population were factors conducive to the peace process.

8. His country was firmly resolved to continue its efforts to achieve a genuine and just peace on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the principle of "land for peace". His country called on the international community to exert pressure on Israel in order to oblige it to return to real negotiations and to put an end to the policy it had been conducting in the Golan, South Lebanon and Palestine. Israel must confirm its declarations of its commitment to peace by the complete withdrawal of its forces from all Arab territories, which would be seen as a genuine display of good will.

9. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon) said that the report of the Special Committee gave a full enough picture of Israeli activities in the occupied Arab territories. The occupation by Israel of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan Heights since 1967, as well the occupation of South Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley since 1978, had been accompanied by flagrant violations of the norms of international law and the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Those violations included unlawful confiscation of property, detention of civilians, torture, expulsions, demolition of the homes of participants in the resistance, closure of schools and universities, and roadblocks, as well as the continuation of the policy of annexation and expansion of settlements. Confiscation of land and collective punishment were also continuing, as was the practice of giving settlers permits to build houses on confiscated land, with homes being demolished on the pretext that they were constructed without the appropriate permit.

10. Currently, 20,000 persons were living in the Syrian Golan, whereas formerly, at the time of the occupation in 1967, 110,000 persons had lived there in 244 settlements. The Special Committee had noted the arbitrary measures taken by the occupation authorities against the Arab population: imposition of excessively high taxes, violation of the sanctity of the home, confiscation of property in cases of non-payment of taxes, prohibition of the sinking of wells by Arab inhabitants of the Golan, seizure of water sources, attempts to eliminate the Syrian identity of the population of the Golan and forced Judaization through the introduction in schools of Israeli curricula and the restriction of access to the Syrian mass media. In the western part of the Bekaa Valley, Israel also continued to violate the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) of 19 March 1978 concerning the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon.

11. During the previous month, Israeli military aircraft had made more than 300 flights over southern Lebanon and the western part of the Bekaa Valley. The liberated areas in the south were continuously subjected to mortar fire, which had left 139 people dead and 110 injured. As a result of the land and sea bombardment, 28 homes had been destroyed and 83 damaged, as well as 60 schools and 54 mosques, proving yet again that Israel was continuing to pursue a policy of cruel repression and to flout the elementary norms of international law. It was important to note in that connection that various weapons prohibited under international law were being used by the Israeli forces against the population of southern Lebanon. Furthermore, in addition to those acts of aggression, Israel was seizing coastal areas and had forbidden fishermen from going about their business and earning a living.

12. In the light of those facts, the question arose as to whether Israel had really secured its borders. Israel must withdraw unconditionally from southern Lebanon, as stipulated in Security Council resolution 425 (1978) in its literal sense, rather than in the interpretation of the Israeli occupiers. In that connection, he asked how long the Israeli occupiers would flout international law, disregard the will of the international community and reject its resolutions.

13. **Mr. Shafi Sami** (Bangladesh) said that the report of the Special Committee was comprehensive and informative, and observed that in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories Israel continued to pursue a policy of settlement, confiscation of land, closures, arrests, detention, torture and

denial of access to legal recourse. Such a policy systematically violated the relevant United Nations resolutions and international agreements and treaties, including the peace treaty on the principle of "land for peace" signed by Palestine and Israel in Oslo. The construction of settlements in Jebel Abu Ghneim and other occupied territories was undesirable and gave reason to doubt Israel's sincerity and its commitment to the peace process.

14. Foreign occupation in itself constituted a flagrant violation of human rights. Prolonged occupation only worsened the situation. During the period under review, Israel had continued systematically to violate human rights in the occupied territories and to pursue a policy of using force to suppress resistance against the occupation. Furthermore, actions by individuals were met with massive retaliation, which was supplemented by a well-planned campaign to demoralize the people of the occupied territories, particularly the Palestinians, with a view to perpetuating the illegal occupation under various pretexts.

15. Israel continued to conduct its policy of economic blockade and collective punishment. Often, Israel closed the Palestinian territories entirely, thereby obstructing the movement of persons and goods within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as in the self-rule area and Israel. Under the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, signed in 1995, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were regarded as constituting a single territorial unit. Israel, however, had failed to honour the terms of that agreement and was obstructing the implementation of infrastructure projects related to trade and other sectors with the aim of undermining the economy of the occupied territories, including the self-rule area.

16. Israeli settlement in the occupied territories had always been a source of tension. It appeared from the report of the Special Committee that 194 Israeli settlements had been established in the occupied Palestinian territories. In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip alone, the number of settlers had risen from 116,400 in 1993 to 175,000 in 1998. It was regrettable that, instead of freezing the construction of settlements and ultimately giving up the plan entirely, Israel continued to build new settlements, including one in Jebel Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. The completion of the settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim would leave the Arab population of East Jerusalem encircled by Jewish settlements. That would have serious consequences in terms of the demographic composition of East Jerusalem.

17. The decision by Israel to expand the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem had been discussed in the Security Council in June 1998. The international community had urged Israel to refrain from implementing that decision, since such a plan would contribute to further growth of the Israeli population of the city, which already constituted the majority of the city's inhabitants. It should be noted that Israel's actions could create a situation that might explode at any time, resulting in significant loss of life among the Palestinian population.

18. The Israeli policy of confiscation of land and restriction of access to water resources, as well as the demolition of houses in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the Golan, would in no way bring peace to the region. His delegation strongly condemned the Israeli policy of systematic violation of basic human rights in the occupied territories and reminded Israel that, under the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and other relevant resolutions, it was obliged to guarantee the basic human rights of the people under its occupation.

19. In contravention of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories were depriving children of their right to health, education, freedom of expression and play. In many instances, schoolchildren were unable to attend classes because they had to travel through Israeli settlements, where the inhabitants did not allow Palestinians the right of passage. The people and Government of Bangladesh were gravely concerned about Israeli practices in the occupied territories. They expressed their total solidarity with their Palestinian Arab brothers and considered that the crucial question facing the people under Israeli occupation was how to restore their human dignity, their right to personal property and their freedom in decision-making. He called on Israel to put an end immediately to its occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories and to cooperate fully with the Special Committee and allow it to investigate the situation of human rights in the occupied territories.

20. His delegation fully endorsed the recommendations of the Special Committee concerning the safeguarding of the basic human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories and called upon the international community to continue its efforts to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the other Arab territories.

21. **Mr. Ba-Isa** (Yemen) said it was unfortunate that Israel continued to deny the members of the Special Committee permission to visit the occupied territories to conduct an on-site investigation of the facts and to obtain more information

on the living conditions of the people under occupation. It was no longer possible to conceal the facts and the real situation; the whole world knew of the tragedy and suffering of the population of the occupied Arab territories. Although the occupying authorities had attempted to hide and distort the facts, the report of the Special Committee attested to the deterioration of the situation in the occupied territories, despite the talks being held on the prospects for the Middle East peace process. Israel continued to expand its unlawful settlements, expropriate land, take over water resources, demolish homes, change the demographic composition of the territories, especially Jerusalem, and make use of torture and collective punishment. Those actions were hardly conducive to confidence-building or indicative of the goodwill required to establish a normal climate for the negotiations and, ultimately, for the achievement of peace and stability.

22. In the occupied Syrian Golan and other Arab territories, Israel continued to commit unlawful acts such as human rights violations, attempts to change the national character of the territories, placement of landmines, refusal to allow family reunifications and adoption of harsh laws aimed at the establishment of absolute control, despite the positive developments taking place in the international sphere. Israel also resorted to similar measures in southern Lebanon. It should be noted that the Geneva Conventions were fully applicable to the occupied Arab territories, as confirmed by resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. However, in the absence of an objective analysis and assessment of the real situation, it was not possible to clear up misconceptions and make progress. Individual States and the international community should take responsibility for ensuring that the resolutions which had been adopted were implemented, and should exert pressure on the occupying authorities to force them to comply with the provisions of international instruments. Otherwise, more victims and further suffering would inevitably result.

23. In conclusion, he underlined the importance of issuing documents on time so that delegations could review and comment on them.

24. **Mr. Dausá** (Cuba) said that, for the Government and people of Cuba, solidarity with the Palestinian people and with other Arabs living in similar situations was a matter of principle and took the form of unconditional support for all their legitimate and inalienable rights. In his delegation's view, the work of the Special Committee was increasingly important for the achievement of the objectives of peace in the Middle East and respect for the rights of the Palestinian people. His delegation regretted that the Israeli Government continued to deny the Special Committee access to the occupied territories, since that situation was undoubtedly detrimental to the Special Committee's work. At the current session, as in all previous years, the Special Committee had provided the General Assembly with evidence of violations of the most elemental human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories, including Israeli policies of establishing settlements, confiscating land, closing territories, mistreating prisoners and revoking permits for residence in Jerusalem. His delegation renewed its demand for an end to such violations and full respect for all the rights of the Palestinian people.

25. Cuba, like the rest of the international community, aspired to find a solution to the problems in the Middle East and that would not be possible without a definitive settlement of the question of Palestine, as the cornerstone of such a solution. One of the most important issues in that connection was the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, adopted in 1949. The Security Council had repeatedly confirmed the applicability of that Convention to the occupied territories, including Jerusalem. On 15 July 1999, a Conference of the High Contracting Parties had been held to consider the Convention's applicability to the Palestinian territories. The participants in that Conference had not only reaffirmed the Convention's applicability, but also reiterated the need for compliance with all its provisions in the Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation.

26. The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and the signing, by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 had raised hopes for peace in the Middle East. The subsequent signing of the Wye River Memorandum had revived those hopes, and for a moment the solution to the question of Palestine had seemed closer than ever before. However, countless obstacles had been put in the way of peace, such as the establishment of new settlements, the violation of Jerusalem's international status and violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people, which had again confirmed the Israeli authorities' reluctance to move forward with the Middle East peace process. On 4 September 1999, Yasser Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, had signed the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, again raising hopes for progress in the peace process. However, his delegation was concerned to note that, despite the agreement, the Israeli Government continued to violate the rules of international humanitarian law in the occupied territories.

27. The international community hoped that Israel would not disappoint the hopes of the Palestinian people and other Arabs living in the occupied territories. In that connection,

the Special Committee should undoubtedly continue its mandate until a definitive solution to the question of Palestine had been achieved and the rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs were fully realized. Until peace was achieved in the Middle East, the Arabs, in particular the Palestinian people, could count on the full support of the Cuban people.

28. **Mr. Lamdan** (Israel) said that the Special Committee's original mandate, adopted in 1968, only a year and a half after the 1967 Six-Day War, had been a product of its time. It should be recalled that Israel had not provoked that war; it had not sought to seize territories and it had used force only in self-defence. After the war, Israel had unsuccessfully tried to reach peace agreements with its Arab neighbours, but it had not been until 1991, a quarter of a century later, that the current peace process had been initiated in Madrid.

29. From the beginning, the Special Committee's mandate had been so biased against Israel that all fair-minded States had voted against it or abstained. Currently, as in the past, two of the three members of the Special Committee came from countries that refused to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, even though Israel maintained full relations with some 90 per cent of the States Members of the United Nations. Because the proponents of the original 1968 resolution had sought not dialogue, but diplomatic warfare, Israel had simply refrained from cooperating with the Special Committee.

30. The Special Committee had always taken a narrow-minded approach, as was shown by its reports, which hardly acknowledged that a serious peace process had been under way in the Middle East for the past eight years and that significant progress had been made towards the resolution of a long-standing territorial conflict. The most recent report, in particular, did not mention that Israel was currently in the process of redeploying in 40 per cent of the territories, that for the past three years 98 per cent of the Palestinians living in the territories had been under the control of the Palestinian Authority, that the territories were open, that over 100,000 Palestinians worked in Israel every day, that a road providing safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would be opened the following week, or that commercial and other agreements had been concluded recently with the Palestinians. Similarly, it provided no information on the ongoing releases of Palestinian prisoners who had taken part in attacks on innocent Israeli citizens or, indeed, on the fact that, when Israel had regrettably been obliged to close the territories in the recent past, the cause had invariably been serious terrorist outrages in major cities, which had continued even after the signing of the Wye River Memorandum.

31. The report failed to note that the proportion of the Jewish majority in Jerusalem had remained roughly the same for the past two centuries and that, after 1948, the Golan Heights had been a large military encampment of 130,000 Syrian soldiers and a very insignificant number of Druze inhabitants living dangerously close to landmines laid by their own military. Even more importantly, the report did not mention that, on 4 September 1999, Israel and the Palestinians had pledged to try to agree on the principles of a permanent settlement of outstanding issues within five months, or that Israel's Prime Minister had promised to withdraw Israeli troops from Lebanon by the following summer. The High Court had recently taken a decision regarding the methods of interrogation of suspected terrorists, and the Cabinet Committee on Settlement Affairs had decided to eliminate unlawful settlements that had sprung up after the signing of the Wye River Memorandum.

32. It was therefore clear that the Special Committee did not serve any useful purpose and that its reports did not advance the cause of peace. Instead, it meddled in affairs that could only — and would only — be dealt with in direct negotiations between the parties to the conflict. At best, the Special Committee was redundant; at worst, it was harmful. Its existence discredited the Organization and undermined its credibility in matters related to the Arab-Israeli dispute. For the sake of peace in the Middle East, it should be disbanded.

33. **Mr. Al-Hajri** (Qatar) said that the inhuman Israeli practices with regard to the Arab population might make everyone realize the danger posed by Israel's violation of all norms of international law, international human rights instruments, including the fourth Geneva Convention, and resolutions of the international community. At the recent Conference of States parties to the fourth Geneva Convention, it was emphasized that the provisions of the Convention were fully applicable to Palestinian and other occupied Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, and must be unswervingly observed.

34. From the very outset of the peace process, Qatar had supported all efforts aimed at resolving the Middle East conflict, and condemned all attempts to undermine that process. Unfortunately, the practices which hampered the peace process continued even under the current Israeli Government. Continuation of that trend might put a complete stop to the peace process. Israel should heed the voice of the world community and cease violating the human rights of

the Palestinian people, as described in the report under consideration.

35. New hopes had been awakened by the agreement signed on 4 September 1999 in Sharm al-Sheikh. In that connection, it was astonishing to note from a report in the mass media that a new law had been adopted in Israel giving the settlers in the Syrian Arab Golan special privileges connected with living and building new settlements in that region. Israel must bear in mind that the continued building of new settlements might void the negotiations of any substance and lead the peace process into an impasse.

36. **Mr. Fadaifard** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the facts set forth in the report of the Special Committee (A/54/325) illustrated that the occupying Power was not only committed to its own undertakings but also constantly sought to consolidate its occupation through changes in the demographic composition of the occupied territories by creating faits accomplis. That had been an integral part of Israel's overall campaign to Judaize the occupied territories by changing their legal status, character and demographic composition. Unlawful policies and inhuman practices had not only been directed against the inhabitants of the occupied territories but also been conducted to perpetuate the status of 4 million Palestinians who lived in refugee camps under precarious conditions.

37. The living conditions in the occupied territories violated the fourth Geneva Convention, whose provisions were applicable to all the occupied territories. However, the occupying Power ignored completely and intentionally not only United Nations resolutions but also the consensus opinion of the international community. It was imperative that the occupying Power should accept the applicability of the fourth Geneva Convention to all the occupied territories and fully implement its provisions. The international community, for its part, should continue to monitor the human rights situation in the occupied territories. A comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine lay in the restoration of all the rights of the Palestinian people, including the return of all Palestinian refugees and displaced persons to their homeland, the full and free exercise of their right to self-determination and the liberation of all occupied territories.

38. **Mr. Tekaya** (Tunisia) said that his delegation had taken note of the report of the Special Committee (A/54/325), which confirmed that the occupying Power was continuing its practices and thereby violating the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs. Those practices ran counter to the spirit and letter of international instruments, particularly the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and also of resolutions of the United Nations. The report set forth alarming facts concerning the Israeli policy of colonization in the occupied Arab territories and the Syrian Arab Golan, including the confiscation of lands, the building of settlements, the change in the status of Jerusalem, and so on. In addition, the Israeli authorities continued their oppression of Palestinian citizens. The report indicated that the measures adopted by Israel had serious consequences for the lives of the Palestinian and Syrian population.

39. Tunisia wished to express its satisfaction at the signing of the Sharm al-Sheikh memorandum and the start made on implementing the Wye River Agreements. In that connection, he stressed the necessity that all parties should fulfil their commitments. The measures taken to build settlements contradicted the concept of peace. He recalled that the peace process was based on such principles as "land for peace" and respect for the commitments made in the Agreements. He hoped that the negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem would be successful and that the rights of the Palestinian people, especially their right to establish an independent State, would be fully realized. Tunisia hoped that the negotiations would be resumed on all tracks, including those where movement had stopped. Israel must, pursuant to United Nations resolutions, fully and unconditionally withdraw from South Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Golan.

40. **Ms. Nasser** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, referred to certain comments made by the delegation of Israel and also to the appeals to curtail the work of the Special Committee. That Committee had been mandated to investigate the policies and practices of Israel until such time as the Israeli occupation had been brought to an end. There was no question that the occupation was continuing and that the human rights of the Palestinian people were, as in the past, being grossly violated. Consequently, the Committee must continue its work. Unfortunately, the peace process had not put an end to the occupation and to the other violations committed by Israel. That process required far-reaching changes in the position not of the international community but of Israel itself, including its recognition of the applicability of the fourth Geneva Convention, and also its cessation of all work on the construction of settlements. In other words, Israel must change its attitude towards the norms of international law, and only then would peace in the region become a reality. It was to be regretted that Israel had falsified the facts relating to Jerusalem. It was well known that the Israeli policy with regard to Jerusalem over many years had been aimed at changing its demographic composition for the

benefit of Israel. The Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, were still under occupation. Israel's affirmation that the majority of Palestinians were not living under conditions of occupation did not correspond to reality and testified to Israel's intention to establish a system of apartheid. That was totally unacceptable and the occupation must be brought to an end.

41. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statement by the representative of Israel was yet another attempt to misrepresent the facts and to confuse the Organization. It was also an attempt to cast aspersions on the conscientious work done by the Special Committee.

42. As far as the Syrian Golan was concerned, its demographic composition had always reflected the composition of Syria as a whole. Israel had always claimed that, when the Israelis had arrived in Palestine, it had been unpopulated; that was not true. After occupying Palestine, Israel was trying to perpetuate the occupation of Syrian territory. Syrian Arabs in the Golan did not want to lose their Arab identity and rejected attempts to make them into Israelis. In addition, the Israeli Government had referred to the Syrian military presence in the Golan, but Syria had every right to deploy its forces on its own territory, unlike the Israelis, who were deploying their forces outside their territory. Documents in the United Nations archives showed that Israel had repeatedly committed acts of aggression against Syria prior to June 1967.

43. Syria had opened the door to the peace process in the Middle East and chosen peace as a strategy. However, Israel was obstructing that process by its policies in Syria and Lebanon. The statements by the new head of the Israeli Government belied the actual situation in the area, as could be seen from reports in the mass media. In addition, Israel's acts of aggression against southern Lebanon were on the increase. Israel would not be able to achieve the peace which it sought by those means.

44. Lastly, the representative of Israel had stated that the Special Committee's reports discredited the United Nations. In fact, the decline in the Organization's authority was attributable not to the Special Committee but to those who were occupying other people's lands, violating human rights and adopting a policy of repression and terrorism. Syria was ready to resume the peace process at the point at wh[illegible] had been stalled and, if Israel really wanted peace, it [illegible]uld follow suit.

45. **Mr. Zaki** (Egypt), referring to the time of the 1967 war, said that Israel's statements were inaccurate. The truth was that Israel had planned that war, which had pursued a number of goals. In the case of Egypt, the goal had been land for peace; in the case of Syria, it had been control of a strategic military region; and in the case of East Jerusalem, it had been to try once and for all to bury the issue of Palestine and to annex its territory under British mandate. Egypt regretted that Israel had forced it to raise that issue, but it would repeat those explanations each year, regardless of the status of the peace process.

46. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon) said that his delegation had every confidence in the Special Committee and favoured the continuation of its work. He was surprised that the representative of the occupying regime had paid no heed to the critical comments of the international community and the United Nations. That representative had asserted that Israel was not practising repressing in Gaza and the West Bank, or in East Jerusalem. In fact, a very real occupation was occurring and an army was seizing other people's land. As regards southern Lebanon, the occupiers' policy there had changed: instead of deploying armed forces there, they were carrying out daily overflights, about which details were given in the reports of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Thus Lebanon was still occupied and it would actively struggle until all its lands had been returned to it.

47. **Mr. Lamdan** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that in their statements certain members of the Committee were ignoring the fact that at present Israel, together with other countries, was participating in the peace process. Without wishing to embark on a discussion of a historical character, he nevertheless recalled that, as the Syrian representative himself had stated, there had at one time been 130,000 Syrian soldiers in the Golan Heights, whose weapons had been aimed at Israel. It should not be forgotten that it was Egyptian President Nasser who in 1967 had given the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) 24 hours to leave the Sinai peninsula.

48. In his view, the Special Committee was becoming an anachronism, owing to the one-sided nature of its mandate. The task of the Special Committee should be to ensure respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people, but it was still concerned only with the violation of the Palestinians' rights by Israel and paid no attention to the Palestinian Authority's approach to the observance of human rights. According to article 19 of the 1994 Cairo agreement, it was the Palestinian Authority which had assumed responsibility for guaranteeing the rights of 98 per cent of the Palestinians. The achievements of the Palestinian Authority in the area of the defence of human rights were unfortunately highly questionable. In the territory under its control, there were arbitrary arrests, summary judicial

procedures and virtually no freedom of speech. In the preceding three years, dozens of inmates of Palestinian prisons had died while being interrogated. In order to remain relevant, the Special Committee must also devote attention to cases of violations of human rights by the Palestinian Authority.

49. The work of the Special Committee had lost any real significance, because in fact the fate of the peace process would be decided at the direct negotiations between the interested parties on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). He took the opportunity to urge the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to join those negotiations. The problem with the implementation of Security Council resolution 245 (1968) existed only because the Lebanese side did not want to sit at the negotiating table with Israel. As far as the "culture of peace" was concerned, the Arab States and the Palestinian authorities had no right to speak of peace at the negotiating table at the same time as they were waging a diplomatic war against Israel on various levels, including within the Special Committee and other committees of the General Assembly.

50. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation was unable to change its approach in the context of the work of the Special Committee so long as Israel continued to commit the same crimes and violations, despite the ongoing peace process. That was quite clearly illustrated by the facts related in the report of the Special Committee. Not only the Special Committee but also the mass media throughout the world were reporting the cruel repressions of Arabs by Israel. There had been an error in the interpretation of the statement by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, which had led to a misunderstanding: the reference had been to 130,000 civilians, not 130,000 soldiers. Apparently, instead of confining himself to the facts, the representative of Israel was trying to use the mistake to further his own interests. It was well known that, if it had not been for the actions of the Israeli forces in the Arab territories, including Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic would not have been obliged in turn to use troops.

51. The Special Committee had taken into consideration all the facts and circumstances relating to the current turn of events. However, the most important circumstance remained unchanged: the continuing Israeli occupation. Could it have been expected that the Special Committee would announce that the occupation and violations of human rights had ceased? Obviously it was only if that occurred that the representative of Israel would approve the Special Committee's conclusions and advocate the continuation of its mandate. He again emphasized that Syria was the party which had jump-started the peace process, and that was well known to the entire international community. His country expected the new Israeli administration fully to comply with all the obligations assumed by Israel in the context of the previous negotiations. However, the Israeli administration was hampering the development of the peace process by laying down preconditions. The Syrian Arab Republic again emphasized that the concept of a "culture of peace" was incompatible with the continuation of the Israeli occupation, aggression and human rights violations. Peace would not be established in the Middle East until Israel departed from the territories of the Syrian Arab Republic, Palestine and southern Lebanon, since peace in occupation conditions was impossible.

52. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that Israel must fulfil its obligations and leave southern Lebanon without any preliminary conditions. Despite its pro-peace statements, Israel was continuing to conduct military operations against Lebanon, including bombardment from the air and shelling from the sea. Referring to Israel's military force, he said that force was no guarantee of victory or of the attainment of peace on favourable terms. Only strict observance of the Security Council resolutions reflecting the will of the international community could guarantee the achievement of genuine peace in the Middle East.

53. **Mr. Lamdan** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that it would be inappropriate to continue the argument.

54. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 89.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.